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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANJUL 000536

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SUBJECT: GAMBIAN ELECTIONS: NEW ARRESTS RAISE TENSIONS

REF: A. BANJUL 504

[1](#)B. BANJUL 470

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, C.P. Alsup, Reason 1.4 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Only one day after the formal declaration of candidates for the September 22 presidential election, the arrests of key opposition members are raising electoral tensions and driving one opposition candidate to warn of "consequences." The thinly veiled threat suggests that as the election date draws near, The Gambia is entering a more volatile electioneering phase. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) On August 28, three candidates were approved by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to stand for the September 22nd presidential elections: 1) incumbent President Yayha A.J.J. Jammeh, representing the ruling Alliance for Patriotic Re-Oriented and Construction (APRC); 2) National Assembly Member Halifa Sallah, representing the National Alliance for Democracy and Development (NADD); and 3) attorney Ousainou Darboe, representing the alliance of the United Democratic Party (UDP) and the National Reconciliation Party (NRP). One would-be candidate, businessman Henry Gomez, leader of the Gambian Party for Democracy and Progress, was disqualified for failure to meet the residency requirements. A profile of the candidates will be provided septel.

[1](#)3. (C) On August 29, Halifa Sallah, the NADD candidate, phoned the Embassy to register a complaint about the arrest of NADD Executive Committee member Amie Sillah, a well-known and outspoken gender activist and columnist for the "Foroyaa" newspaper, which is owned by Sallah. Sallah reported that Mrs. Sillah was arrested by the NIA for unknown reasons. COMMENT: Mrs. Sillah's arrest may have been provoked by an editorial on the front page of the August 28-29 edition of Foroyaa decrying efforts by the ruling APRC to force civil servants to join the APRC and/or purchase APRC campaign material. END COMMENT. Mr. Sallah also noted that a young NADD political mobilizer, Buba Sanyang, has been in detention for three days without charge. The NADD candidate described these arrests as indications that President Jammeh has no intention of playing by the rules in the upcoming elections. Sallah asserted that though he is a peaceful man, he has no intention of being a weak leader. He said he would not tolerate any harassment or intimidation of his supporters and that if these types of provocations continue, "no one should be surprised at the consequences." He made similar comments in his public statements following his registration for the presidential race.

[1](#)4. (C) COMMENT. This report from the NADD candidate comes on the heels of claims of harassment of campaign workers from the UDP/NRP presidential nominee and is no surprise. What is surprising is the out-of-character, thinly-veiled threat from the usually mild-mannered Halifa Sallah. These arrests and Sallah's reaction suggest that The Gambia is entering a more

volatile electioneering phase. It is doubtful that Sallah's threats (or threats from any other member of the opposition), veiled or otherwise, will have any impact on the use of unfair election tactics by the ruling APRC party, and we expect more arrests, and more harassment of opposition campaign workers and the media as the election draws nearer.
END COMMENT.
ALSUP